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ABSTRACT

The Staff Development for School Improvement Program (SDSI) at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) and Wayne State University (WSU) is an exceptional undertaking, designed to promote school improvement through the cooperative actions of EMU and WSU, and public schools. In the program, a university faculty member (facilitator) is assigned to work with the staff of a designated school to design and implement a staff development project. The use of a participatory decision making model (the six-step process), and the adoption of a project which results in improvement of the instructional environment, are the two primary outcomes expected from the SDSI. A survey was developed focusing on the perceptions of the key players, teachers, building leadership teams, principals and university facilitators relative to the expected outcomes of the six-step process-participatory decision making and adoption of a project which results in improvement of the instructional environment. Basic general recommendations offered cover two areas: (1) the perception of the teachers of the six-step process and how it related to expected educational outcomes; and (2) the preparation of the facilitator in assisting the teachers. (Author/JD)

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PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING BY "KEY PLAYERS" IN A COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING BY "KEY PLAYERS" IN A COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

ABSTRACT

The Staff Development for School Improvement Program (SDSI) at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) and Wayne State University (WSU) is an exceptional undertaking, designed to promote school improvement through the cooperative actions of EMU, WSU, and public schools. In the program, a university faculty member (facilitator) is assigned to work with the staff of a designated school to design and implement a staff development project. The use of a participatory decision making model (the six-step process), and the adoption of a project which results in improvement of the instructional environment, are the two primary outcomes expected from the Staff Development for School Improvement Program.

Two other institutions which also use the six-step process (Monroe County Intermediate School District and Taylor School District) joined with EMU and WSU to form the Collaborative School Improvement Process (C-SIP) Consortium and cooperated on an evaluation project. With the help of an external evaluator a study was designed and a survey instrument was developed. The survey focuses on perceptions of the key players, teachers, building leadership teams (composed of teachers), principals, and university facilitators relative to the expected outcomes of the six-step process-participatory decision making and adoption of a project which results in improvement of the instructional environment. The items on the survey are based upon the beliefs of those who developed the six-step process.

Schools typically participate in the collaborative school improvement program for a period of three years. Thus in this study there are schools in their first, second and third year of the cycle. Since the process functions over the complete K-12 school program, elementary, middle/junior high and senior high schools, all levels are represented in the evaluation study. This paper reports on two sets of findings from data collected at the end of the 1987 - 1988 school year. One set of findings is from the 15 schools collaborating with Eastern Michigan University (eight (8) elementary, three (3) middle/junior high and four (4) senior high schools). The second set of findings is from the 28 schools collaborating with Wayne State University (twenty-two (22) elementary, three (3) middle/junior high and three (3) senior high schools). In each situation, the University provided funding and facilitator services to these schools to carry out the six-step process of school improvement.

The findings point out clearly that there are differences in perceptions held by teachers, building level teams, principals and university facilitators. The principals perceived the highest level of agreement about the collaborative school improvement program in their school meeting the expected outcomes, followed in order by facilitators, building level team members, and teachers. There was no major difference associated with being an elementary, middle/junior high or senior high principal. Furthermore, the perceptions of principals in the first year of the cycle did not differ significantly from those who have been with the program for two or three years. The teachers gave the lowest overall rating. Perceptions of agreement with expected educational outcomes for elementary teachers were highest, followed in order by senior high school teachers then middle/junior high school teachers.

Several conclusions are suggested by the findings that may influence the effectiveness of the program. One of the more important conclusions is that the further removed from the management of the project, the less likely the teacher is to relate the six-step process to the expected outcomes. Principals, building leadership teams, and the facilitators interact on a frequent basis revisiting the steps throughout the school year as they manage the projects in their schools. Unless conscious effort is made to communicate and involve teachers not part of the leadership team, the enthusiasm and sense of ownership generated in the early part of the

school year when the project is launched, can be dissipated as the teachers become engrossed in their classroom duties.

Another important conclusion is that the principals are positive about shared decision making. It has been our experience that some principals are initially uncertain about sharing the control of the staff development project with teachers. It could be that the six-step process provides a safe structure for practicing participatory decision making and shared control. As the data are disaggregated, special characteristics of individual schools (e.g. whether the school year began with conflict over collective bargaining, district funding cutbacks, reduction or reassignment of personnel etc.) emerge which appear to influence teacher perceptions relative to the effectiveness of the program. These factors suggest that special training for facilitators may be needed in order to enhance the human relations skills required to assist building staffs in working through the collaborative school improvement process.

INTRODUCTION

The first Michigan School Improvement Program was initiated by the Taylor School District in 1974 as a Title I demonstration project. These first programs focused on concerns such as instructional management, behavior modification, classroom management, and more efficient means of teaching reading. These programs were found to be very acceptable to both teachers and administrators. As a result of the wide acceptance of these demonstration projects, the program was expanded and gained the attention of others including the Michigan Department of Education,the College of Education of Eastern Michigan University, the College of Education of Wayne State University, the Monroe Intermediate School District as well as others.

The Collaborative School Improvement Process was known originally as the Staff Development for School Improvement Program. The process, developed by personnel from the Taylor School District, is a structured six-step process through which school staffs can cooperatively identify and address their most needed areas for school improvement. Furthermore, this six step process integrates democratic principles of participation in decision-making and utilizes staff development for school improvement.

The six steps of the school improvement process are:

Step I: Awareness, Readiness, and Commitment

The Awareness session includes:

1) A brief history of the program.
2) A discussion of its purpose and the assumptions on which it is based.
3) An explanation of the six step process.
4) A consideration of the benefits of a project for staff development.

Step II: Interactive Needs Assessment

The Interactive Needs Assessment includes:

1) Establishment of the goal of the project.
2) Determination of operating procedures and job responsibilities
3) Election of the Building Level Team (BLT)

Step III: Development and Approval of the Plan

The Development and Approval of the Plan includes:

1) The Building Level Team writes the Plan for the Project.
2) A facilitator helps to design the strategies for implementing the project.
3) Interaction with the staff to assure acceptance of the Plan.

Step IV: Implementation and Tailoring

Implementation and Tailoring includes:

1) Carrying out the goals, objectives and activities specified in the Plan.
2) Promoting active support of every person in the building from the custodian to the Principal.
3) Focusing on activities engaged in by teachers typically for a period of three to six months.

Step V: Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation includes:

1) Determining the degree to which the goals and objectives of the program are being achieved.

Step VI Interactive Reassessment of Needs (Adoption)

Interactive Reassessment of Needs includes:

1) Examining the effectiveness of the completed project.
2) Identification of new needs.
3) Employing the six-step process to another project.

The assumptions underlying SDSI:C-SIP are:

1. Meaningful change occurs as a process, not as an event.
2. People behave the way they do because it makes sense to them. Every person is logical in his/her own context.
3. Persons affected by decisions must be involved in making them. Shared decision-making builds personal ownership and collective commitment for those involved.
4. The most critical variable in effective teaching is the extent to which one can interact with and release the potential of others.

5. Effective curriculum is a human process, necessitating change in interaction patterns, e.g., support systems.
6. The principal alone cannot create effective change, but he/she can and must facilitate change.
7. Leadership skills cannot be presumed: any change model must provide for leadership development.
8. For significant change to occur in behavior, formalized outside intervention is necessary: continuous communication is essential to incorporate behavioral change.
9. Participants should incorporate current literature, research, and practice in their deliberations.
10. Although consultant help is necessary and important, direction for change must come from local sources.

During the past 8 years reports have been prepared by personnel from the local school districts participating in the program, by personnel from the universities who provided facilitators, and by external contracted personnel.The different format of these reports for each major group conducting the evaluations resulted in presentations that made it difficult to compare the result of the different programs. It was the decision of the SDSI:C-SIP Evaluation Subcommittee to have a common evaluation conducted for the 1987-88 school year programs.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed to measure the perceptions of teachers, building level team (BLT) members, principals and facilitators relative to those educational outcomes that are expected to occur as a result of a school participating in SDSI:C-SIP. These outcomes include knowledge, skills, and attitudes that impact the school staff, factors that impact the teaching-learning process, and factors that impact the knowledge, skills and attitudes of students.

A basic questionnaire consisting of 16 statements was developed; however, to make the questionnaire relevant for teachers,BLT members, principals, and facilitators minor changes in some of the items were made.

The response categories for each of the items contained in the questionnaire were as follows

Agree	Moderately Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Moderatley Disagree	Disagree

As can be seen there were no right or wrong answers. The respondents were asked for their perceptions for each of the statements which were designed to measure expected educational outcomes due to participation in SDSI:C-SIP.

The questionnaires were distributed and administered by the local educational agencies.

Among the factors of interest relative to the potential impact of SDSI:C-SIP were:

a. What is the level of acceptance of the school process as perceived by teachers, building level teams, principals, and facilitators?
b. Do the perceptions of school personnel differ according to their position as a teacher, building level team member, principal, or facilitator?

c. Do these perceptions vary because the participants are associated with an elementary, middle/junior high school, or senior high school program?

d. Do these perceptions vary because the participants are in different phases of the SDSI:C-SIP cycle?

FINDINGS
EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

The findings reported in this section are from the questionnaires completed by the teachers, BLT members,principals and facilitators. The staffs of the fifteen schools cooperated with EMU during the 1987-88 school year with EMU providing funding and facilitator assistance. These schools consisted of eight elementary schools, three middle/junior high schools and four high schools. The elementary schools consisted of four schools in the first year cycle, three schools in the second year cycle and one school in the third year cycle. The participating middle/junior high school consisted of three schools in the first year cycle, and no schools in the second and third year cycles. Four high schools participated in the project of which two were in the first year, and one each in each of the second and third year cycles.

Based upon the responses to the items contained in the questionnaire, the answers to these four questions posed in this study are:

1. What is the level of acceptance of the school improvement process as perceived by teachers, building level teams, principals, and facilitators.

   a. Using the percent of responses to the combined categories of Agree, Somewhat Agree, and Slightly Agree found in the questionnaire, the levels of acceptance were:

Principals	94%
Facilitators	92%
Building level teams	86%
Teachers	73%

2. Do the perceptions of school personnel differ relative to their position as a teacher, building level team member, principal or facilitator?

   Using the six category scale of Agree, Moderatley Agree, Disagree, Moderately Disagree, and Disagree, the overall average levels of perception were:

Position	Subjective Category	Average Score
Principals	Agree	5.28
Facilitators	Moderately Agree	4.82
Building Level Team	Moderately Agree	4.73
Teachers	Slightly Agree	4.02

Principals appear to have the highest relative level of perception equal to the category of agree, with facilitators and building level team members forming a second group with perceptions equivalent to Moderately Agree, and teachers a distinctly different group with a perception rating of Slightly Agree.

3. Do these perceptions vary because the participants are associated with an elementary, middle/junior high school, or senior high school program?

   a. These data suggest that the perceptions held by teachers is highest at the elementary level, second highest at the senior high level, and lowest at the middle school level. These average levels of perception were Moderately Agree for elementary, Slightly Disagree for middle school, and Slightly Agree for senior high school teachers.

   b. For building level teams, the average levels of perception were similar for elementary and senior high school personnel, a rating of Moderately Agree; whereas, middle school personnel had a lower rating of Slightly Agree.

   c. For principals, there were essentially no differences among the responses with principals at the elementary, middle school and senior high school level all having average perception levels rated as Agree, the highest attainable level.

   d. For facilitators, there were slight differences among the averages for the facilitators suggesting a potential downward trend from elementary to middle school to the senior high school level. Even though this slight trend might be present, the overall average level of perception was a rating of Moderately Agree for the three groups of facilitators.

4. Do these perceptions vary because the participants were in different phases of the SDSI:CIP cycle?

   a. For elementary teachers, although they gave an overall average rating of Moderately Agree for each of the years in the three year cycle, these data suggest a general increase in perception from the first through the third year.

   b. For middle school teachers these data suggest a decrease in perception occurs during the three year cycle. The overall average subjective ratings of Slightly Agree for the first and second years drops to Slightly Disagree for the third year. This conclusion should be considered as tentative due to small sample size.

   c. For senior high school teachers, these data suggest that a general increase in perception takes place from the first through the third year. Because the sample for the third year was small these results could be misleading.

d. Because of small sample sizes, and in some cases because there was no data, it was not possible to determine if there were differences due to years in the program for building level teams, principals, and facilitators.

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

The findings reported in this section are from the questionnaires completed by the teachers, BLT members and principals of the 28 schools cooperating with WSU during the 1987-88 school year. Wayne State University provided funding and facilitator assistance for these schools. These schools consisted of 22 elementary schools, 3 middle/junior high schools, and 3 senior high schools. The elementary schools consisted of 4 schools in the first year cycle, 9 schools in the second year cycle, and 9 schools in the third year cycle. The participating middle/junior high schools consisted of no schools in the first year cycle, 2 schools in the second year cycle, and one in the third year cycle. Three senior high schools participated in the project of which none were in the first year, one in the second and 2 in the third year cycle.

Based upon the responses to the items contained in the questionnaire, the answers to these four questions posed in this study are:

1. What is the level of acceptance of the school improvement process as perceived by teachers, building level teams, and principals?

   a. Using the percent of responses to the combined categories of Agree, Somewhat Agree, and Slightly Agree used in the questionnaire, the levels of acceptance were:

Principals	92%
Building Level teams	81%
Teachers	79%

2. Do the perceptions of school personnel differ relative to their position as a teacher, building level team member, or principal?

Using the six category scale of Agree, Moderately Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Moderately Disagree, and Disagree, the overall average level of perceptions were:

Position	Subjective Category	Average Score
Principals	Moderately Agree	5.09
Building Level Teams	Moderately Agree	4.49
Teachers	Moderately Agree	4.25

As indicated above, the average response for the principals was the highest, 5.09 out of a possible 6.0. Following in order were building level team members at 4.49, and teachers with the lowest average of 4.25. Using the average score as an indicator of participant's perceptions, it would appear that the perceptions held by principals, building level teams and teachers are significantly different. That is, principals appear to have the highest relative level of perception followed by building level teams and the lowest levels held by teachers.

3. Do these perceptions vary because the participants were associated with an elementary, middle/junior high school, or senior high school program?

   a. These data suggest that the perceptions of teachers varies with the category of school. Elementary teachers had the highest level of perception followed by senior high school teachers with middle school teachers having the lowest relative level of perception. The average levels of perception were Moderately Agree for elementary, Slightly Agree for Middle Schools, and Slightly Agree for High School Teachers.

   b. For building level teams, the senior high and middle school personnel had higher relative levels of perception when compared with elementary school personnel. However, all building level teams had a rating of Moderately Agree.

   c. Because of the very limited number of Middle and senior high principals included in the study, it was not possible to determine differences in perceptions among elementary, middle school, and senior high school principals.

4. Do these perceptions vary because the participants are in different phases of the C-SIP cycle?

   a. No significant differences in average levels of perception were found among elementary teachers as related to the number of years in C-SIP. Elementary teachers had an overall rating of Moderately Agree.
   b. For middle school teachers, these data suggest a decrease in perception occurs during the two year cycle (i.e.,There were no middle schools in the first year cycle, hence no data were available). The overall average rating of Slightly Agree for the second year decreased to Slightly Disagree for the third year. This finding should be considered as tentative due to small sample size.
   c. For senior high school teachers, these data suggest that a general increase in perception takes place from the second year (i.e., high school teachers had an overall rating of Slightly Agree) to the third year (i.e., high school teacher had an overall rating of Moderately Agree). This finding should be viewed with caution due to small sample size.
   d. For elementary building level teams, the levels of perception remained constant (i.e., Moderately Agree) over the three year cycle.

e. For elementary principals, these data suggest that a minor trend toward increases in levels of perception occur as time in the program increases. The elementary principals had an overall rating of Moderately Agree.

f. Because of small sample sizes, and in some cases no data, it was not possible to determine if there were differences due to years in the program for middle and high school building level teams and principals.

An additional finding of particular interest to those concerned with school improvement programs are the responses of the key players to seven items considered to be measures of school improvement.

The items are:

Change resulting in an improved school climate occurred during the 1987-88 school year as a result of SDSI:C-SP.

Students in this school reflected an improvement in academic performance as a result of SDSI:C-SIP.

Teachers experienced an improvement in their instructional skills as a result of SDSI:C-SIP.

Improvements in curriculum occurred because of SDSI:C-SIP.

Changes resulting in improved teaching strategies occurred because of SDSI:C-SIP.

The goal, chosen by our school staff for the 1987-88 school year was attained.

Improvements in building administrative strategies occurred because of SDSI:C-SIP.

Using the six category scale of Agree, Moderately Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Moderately Disagree, and Disagree, the overall average levels of perception were as follows:

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Position	Subjective Category 7-Sch. Improvement Item	Subjective Category Overall Levels of Agreement
Principals	Agree	Agree
Facilitators	Moderately Agree	Moderately Agree
BLT	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree
Teachers	Slightly Agree	Slightly Agree

These data suggest perceptions held by all principals, facilitators and the teachers for these seven items that measure school improvement was similar for the process as well as the seven items. The building level teams perception of acceptance was lower on the seven items than their perception of acceptance of the overall process.

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Position	Subjective Category 7-Sch. Improvement Items	Subjective Category Overall Level of Agreement
Principals	Moderately Agree	Moderately Agree

BLT	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree
Teachers	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree

These data suggest that the perceptions held by all principals for these seven items that measure school improvement was similar for the process as well as these seven items. The building level teams and teachers perception of acceptance was lower on the seven items than their perception of acceptance of the overall process.

CONCLUSIONS

This is the first evaluation which has asked all members of a building team questions about the impact of the SDSI:C-SIP program on them. The findings make it clear that there are differences in perceptions held by teachers, building level teams, principals and University facilitators.

The principals perceived the highest level of agreement about the collaborative school improvement program in their school meeting the expected outcomes, followed in order by facilitators,building level team members, and teachers. There was no major difference associated with being an elementary, middle/junior high or senior high principal. Furthermore, the perceptions of principals in the first year of the cycle did not differ significantly from those who had been in the program for two or three years. The teachers had the lowest overall rating with perceptions of agreement with expected educational outcomes for elementary teachers were highest, followed in order by senior high school teachers then middle/junior high school teachers.

Several conclusions suggested by the findings are:

1) The further removed from the management of the project, the less likely the teacher is to relate the six step process to the expected outcomes.

2) Principals are positive about shared decision making. It could be that the six step process provides a safe structure for practicing participatory decision making and shared control.

3) Special characteristics of individual schools (whether the school year began with some type of conflict) would appear to influence teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the program.

4) Principals should expect at least 20% of their teachers (ie., elementary, middle and high schools) to strongly resist change. Attempts to modify the behavior and attitudes of this segment may be viewed as an inappropriate use of limited human resources.

5) The density of schools involved in the program does not affect the results. That is, remarkable similarity in findings occurred between the programs, although EMU and WSU involved a different number of schools (i.e., 15 and 28 schools respectively).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The basic recommendations offered are general and cover two areas: 1) The perception of the teachers of the six-step process and how it relates to expected educational outcomes, and 2) the preparation of the facilitator in assisting the teachers.

1) Principals, building level teams and facilitators interact on a frequent basis. The six-step process is highly visible as they manage the project. The other teachers may soon lose a sense of ownership. It, therefore, is recommended that:

   a) A conscious effort be made to communicate and involve teachers not part of the leadership team;

      An example of such effort is the creation of an "Expanded Building Level Team." The Expanded Building Level Team would consist of members of the BLT plus chairpersons of any building "standing" or "ad hoc" committees. This "Expanded BLT" would meet only when additional input is needed for decision making.

   b) More information be provided about the purpose and process of the six step process to prepare the teachers of a building entering into the process the first time;

   c) Provisions be made for a clear understanding of the project expectations and proposed outcomes and the relationship to the six step process;

   d) Constant reinforcement be continued with all key players as to the purpose of the six step process and its application in many school settings.

2) Teachers may begin the school year involved in a conflict situation and lose the enthusiasm and sense of ownership in the project. They often become highly engrossed in their classroom activities and distance themselves from the project. It is recommended that special training be provided for facilitators in order to enhance the human relations skills required to assist teachers in working through the collaborative school improvement process.